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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, PM, PM/HDP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: State Department-sponsored team completes
Jaffna demining program, earning rave reviews

Refs: (A) PM/HDP-Colombo 7/24/03 unclass email
- (B) Colombo 868, and previous

1. (U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified --
Please handle accordingly.

2. (SBU) SUMMARY: A State Department-sponsored Quick
Reaction Demining Force (QRDF) is preparing to leave
Sri Lanka after completing its program in war-torn
Jaffna. U.S. involvement in sustained humanitarian
demining in Sri Lanka continues to earn rave reviews.
Mission looks forward to implementation of a follow-on
USG-sponsored demining program slated to kick off in
August. END SUMMARY.

3. (SBU) MISSION COMPLETED: A State Department-
sponsored QRDF team is preparing to leave Sri Lanka
after completing its four-month program in war-torn
Jaffna. (Note: This is the second QRDF team that has
been deployed to Sri Lanka. The first team worked in
Jaffna from April-October 2002.) Since its deployment
to Jaffna in March 2003, the QRDF team made excellent
progress in humanitarian demining. Operating near the
village of Sarasalai, roughly 20 kilometers east of
Jaffna town, the team -- which consisted of U.S.
managers from RONCO company, deminers from Mozambique,
and several dogs -- removed 244 mines and 106 pieces of
unexploded ordnance (UXO). Total square meters cleared
as of July 17 -- the day the QRDF wrapped up its
demining program -- was 72,208.

4. (SBU) KUDOS FOR QRDF: U.S. involvement in sustained
humanitarian demining in Sri Lanka continues to earn
rave reviews. The Tamil community, for example, has
been effusive in its praise for the USG effort, noting
that the QRDF has assisted greatly in the safe return of
displaced persons to their points of origin.
(Note: There are an estimated 500,000 IDPs left in Sri
Lanka, with about 300,000 returns since the advent of
the peace process in December 2001.) Tamil contacts
have noted to us that the QRDF's efforts underscored
U.S. concern with the well-being of their community, as
well as USG support for the peace track. "TamilNet,"
the pro-Tamil Tiger website, has also placed a favorable
spotlight on the QRDF's activities in recent articles.
(Note: TamilNet largely ignored the QRDF team that was
in Jaffna in 2002.) Cooperation between the QRDF and
the Sri Lankan government has also been excellent.

5. (SBU) NEXT STEPS: With respect to the USG's next
moves re demining, Mission is currently working with
PM/HDP to implement another State Department-sponsored
RONCO-led program in Sri Lanka. Per Ref A, this
program, which is currently scheduled to begin in August
2003, would train Sri Lanka Army (SLA) deminers at a
facility in the southern part of the country. This
"next step" program would assist in Jaffna demining, as
the SLA is implementing a large-scale demining program
in that area. (Note: SLA demining, in general, is not
up to international humanitarian standards, which is why
it needs extensive training.)

6. (SBU) COMMENT: As with its predecessor program in
2002, the QRDF has helped underscore strong U.S. support
for the peace process. It has also helped undermine the
Tigers' repeated assertion that international assistance
never gets through to Tamil majority areas. Given the
importance of sustained involvement in this area,
Mission looks forward to implementation of the follow-on
USG-sponsored demining program described above. END
COMMENT.

7. (U) Minimize considered.

ENTWISTLE